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THE

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COMMUNICATIONS, ORIGINAL AND SELECTED.

For the Belfast Monthly Magazine.

ON NATIONAL PREJUDICES.

"Lands intersected by a narrow frith
Abhor each other. Mountains interposed,
Make enemies of nations, who had else
Like kindred drops, been mingled into one.
Thus man devotes his brother."———
COWPER'S TASK.

THE term, "natural enemies," has been applied to nations bordering on each other, because they are under different governments. That it is an *unnatural* appellation, must appear to every one who examines the subject divested of all prejudices, and of an undue bias in favour of self and against others. We may fondly suppose every thing in favour of ourselves, and against our neighbours, and they may retaliate on us with similar partiality; but to the eye of sober reason it appears evident that the sum of human happiness would be much more increased by mutual acts of kindness, each supplying what the other wants, than by the demonizing plan of mutual hostilities.

But not to press this subject farther at present, I am disposed to take up the less display of human prejudices, and to point out the inconveniences of national distinctions between countries legally united under one government, but which have many repelling points that require correction. The English, Scotch and Irish, if they were only truly enlightened to see it, have all one common interest, and yet let the subject be introduced in conversation, national distinctions immediately appear, and with the unthinking many, the aim is to exalt the national character of the country to which the speaker belongs, to the depreciation of that of others. Doubtless many honourable exceptions exist, for the good of all countries are of one family, and cherish a spirit of liberality towards their neighbours; but with the great and little vulgar a propensity to invidious distinctions is painfully conspicuous.

In the literary world a certain cant of expression has prevailed in attributing blunders almost exclusively to Irish writers: hence the phrases, Irishisms, Hibernian blunders, bulls, and similar expressions gratuitously assumed: Scoticism is also a favourite expression with some English writers. In this censure reviewers must also be frequently classed as offenders, those arbiters of public taste, who ought to hold the critical balance with the strictest impartiality, and yet these writers who thus so bountifully deal out their epithets on others, very seldom in the true spirit of impartiality, give us instances of Anglicisms; though provincial, and even metropolitan expressions could easily be selected from English writers equally departing from proper and duly authorized usage. Let a blunder be called a blunder; but, why, in the name of common sense, should Irish be prefixed to it, even when the objectionable phrase may not have been used by an Irishman?

In matters of trade what narrow nationalities prevail! The history of commerce affords curious instances of the oppression exercised by the strong over the weak in such cases. Let us cherish the hope that there is a slow approximation to more enlarged views on this subject; though many prejudices yet remain. I have always been a friend to the legislative union between Great Britain and Ireland, though I highly disapprove of the dishonest means by which it was brought about. Among other reasons I am a friend to this measure, because I expect from it in time, an abatement of national prejudices, and an amalgamation of the interests and views

of the two countries. I am also a friend to the union, because some anomalies in legislation and government are done away by it, and because the minds of Irishmen, through party prejudices, had become so highly exasperated against each other, that it was useful to interpose a great body between them. I could name some proceedings countenanced by the Irish Parliament, which a spirit of party politics introduced, but which the Imperial Parliament, with feelings not so sublimated by local hostilities, would not have taken up. Dublin may suffer a little, but in time I hope, if war should cease its ravages, the increase of commerce would far outweigh the temporary loss arising to the retailers of articles of luxury, owing to the additional number, who have become absentees since the union. At most this can be but a temporary loss, and affects but little, if at all, the state of general commerce. Whether the absentee, with his family, uses Irish linen, or eats Irish butter in England, or in Ireland, is immaterial to the interests of trade; he pays the increased price of bringing these articles into England, and the loss in point of morals cannot be great to this country, from the non-residence of some, whom Ireland counts among her absentees. In the populous province of Ulster, and I believe also in the southern and western ports, no injurious consequences have been felt from the union. Dublin, as the overgrown head to a body, as yet slender, may have suffered; but trade, like water, finds its own level in time, and after a few inconveniences experienced by individuals settles so as to accommodate itself to the general interest. Scotland, after the experience of a century, is found to have profited by her incorporation with England, and the prejudices which were formerly so powerful between the two countries, have nearly sunk into oblivion. Her two attempts in favour of the house of Stuart appear to have had no connection with any affects arising out of the union, nor can some English prejudices against Scotchmen at the commencement of the present reign be traced to this source. The favouritism of an obnoxious minister was in the latter case the efficient cause.

But to render our late union with England more efficacious than a mere incorporation of the two legislatures, much remains to be done. A wise conciliating system of legislation, combining justice and sound policy together, may do much. A generous oblivion of the past on all sides, and a liberal enlightened abatement of ancient prejudices will effect much more. To complete this happy termination of former grievances, each individual should contribute his share, by banishing from his mind all national animosities and antipathies, and instead of being the partisan of one country become the denizen of the whole.

Instead of dwelling only on the defects of national character, let us rather wisely extract the valuable from each, and combine it so as to promote the general good. England is wealthy, and has consequently, as a nation, the haughtiness attendant on wealth, and the long possession of power, but she has habits of industry and frugality, and that kind of decorum and civilization, which commerce gives. Though it may not be of the very first rate, it is still of value at least as an exterior accomplishment. The English nation besides possesses a literary class, whose attainments in science, and in the useful and ornamental arts, form an honourable distinction in national character. From the possession of immense wealth, capable and often willing to reward genius, London is the mart also of literature. Scotland, from being a poor nation, is rising gradually into wealth, and may sometimes carry the arts of rising beyond the proper boundaries. The natural and allowable wish to help each other may degenerate into nationality, and shrewdness or cunning may in some instances usurp the place of wisdom. In this rapid sketch of national manners, I wish to guard against being illiberal, and in assigning traits of character, to aim in pointing out defects, rather to promote reformation than to indulge in censure. All nations have their distinguishing qualities, but, as I said before, the good of all are of one family. In pourtraying Irish manners we must distinguish between the commer-

cial character, more especially as it is blended in the northern province with a similarity to Scotland, from our contiguity to that country, and an identity of circumstances and interests; and the character which more peculiarly belongs to the Irish nation. A high sense of honour, bordering on the romantic, and oftener employed on the trifling than on the more important transactions of life, joined to an improvident thoughtlessness, may be admitted to form a strong feature in Irish lineament. If this delineation be just, it is a character, which, according to the different modifications it assumes, admits of many excellencies and of many glaring defects.

From a review of the whole, instead of offering the repelling points, much advantage might be gained by each country correcting its own errors, and improving by an imitation of the virtues of her neighbours. Let England forego its selfishness, and that hauteur which has rendered her so unpopular among other nations, causes her to be disliked on the continents of Europe and America, and induces her to assume an undue assumption of authority over her younger sisters. Let Scotland moderate her ardour to rise, and cultivate the noble qualities of generosity and open-heartedness. Her literary character stands high, and her very peasants partake of the rudiments of learning. In an especial manner let Ireland, without abating of her honour, study to become useful rather than showy, and let habits of stricter industry and frugality be learned from her more steady neighbours. Instead of being a land of 'squires and of dependents, let us wish for an extension of commerce to fill up the space between the higher and lower ranks, and to level the inequalities of the surface not only without injury to the rich, but with evident advantage to them, and to the improvement and amelioration of the lower ranks both in civilization and morals. In fine, let national distinctions and national reflections cease, and let the three nations become *in fact*, as they are nominally, one country, and that friendly emulation only be exerted, which stimulates to run together in the paths of virtue and peace. Laws must avoidably fall short of effecting every thing, but to an enlightened and liberal system of legislation, let the energies of a united people be added. Even should an untoward concurrence of circumstances prevent the benefits to be derived from beneficial laws, much public advantage and private emolument would be accomplished by the relinquishment of religious and national prejudices. It is not to be expected that men will ever think alike, but where uniformity ends, let a wise forbearance commence, and when we cannot be of one mind conscientiously, let us agree to differ.

As to civilization, we are a young nation, and have yet much to learn, and on this score need instruction in the refinement of our taste. To mention only the single instance of periodical publications, many of those published in England are greatly superior to the Irish publications. The Irish taste has been vitiated by crude trash, and craves a continuance of similar trifling, against which the conductors of a respectable work should make a resolute stand, and as caterers for the public, refuse to gratify a corrupt taste. In an incipient civilization like young people and children, from a perversity incident to immature judgment, we often prefer the sour crab to the matured fruit; but those instructors deserve well of the public, who resist such perverted fancies, and in opposition to present advantage refuse to sell unwholesome garbage.

In the case just alluded to, and in many others we have much to learn. Instead of wrapping ourselves up in self-sufficiency, and thinking ourselves right from a fond attachment to our own way, because it is our own way, or the way of our country, we ought to stand open to conviction, and receive instruction from our neighbours, in such instances, in which they may be wiser than we are. By such a mode of proceeding we may make the experience of others our own, and though we may have to abate in dogmatism, and an overweening attachment to national prejudices, the stock of real improvement will be increased, and the boundaries of substantial knowledge enlarged.

As I have been attempting to draw a hasty sketch of national manners, I shall add another trait in which I think the English have the advantage over my countrymen, in not indulging so freely in the excesses of the table after dinner. In general they are more sober. A literary or moral subject is seldom introduced into conversation after dinner in Ireland, yet it is common in England; where if they have less conviviality, and what is erroneously called good fellowship, they have more rationality and literary taste, as I have experienced on many occasions during my occasional visits to that country. To this cause I attribute the greater degree of intellectual improvement, manifested among many of the mercantile class in England. Some of them are very deeply engaged in business; and yet they find time for literary pursuits. The time gained from undue indulgences of the table is given to reading and other means of improvement without encroaching on business. This is a more rational entertainment than the noisy contests of politics, and the news of the day, or talk of the technical routine of trade generally occupying that portion of the conversation which is spared in many convivial companies from dogs and horses, where the language and manners of jockeys and grooms are well imitated. Noisy companies are too common in all countries, but I am inclined to think that on settling the account, the balance in favour of sobriety and rationality lies with our neighbours, and that our manners would be improved in an imitation of their more prudent plan. K.

To the Editor of the Belfast Magazine.

ON SONG WRITING.

SIR,

CHANCE, accident, design, or idleness, or what you will, threw a very large collection of old and new Songs in my way, and I read them over, with no immediate view of improvement you may suppose, but rather to divert an idle hour, as harmlessly as possible. It occurred to me however, that if I could extract any remarks from those songs, and arrange them methodically, my time would not be totally wasted. As I know not yet in what particular method I may arrange them, the present letter can only contain a few general observations on such as happened particularly to occur to my memory; but if I have leisure to pursue this subject, I promise you something like method in my handling the theory and practice of song-writing. In love songs, which I shall consider first, seems to be an established rule with it the writers of them to steer as clear as possible from common sense, indeed there is but little room for this property in the *brains* of a love sick Poet. He takes leave of the present world and flies to the regions of fancy, where he seeks no other guide, and wishes for no other resting place than Rhime. Confident that the music master will hide all his failings and cover all his defects with quavers and crotchets, he violates every rule of propriety, every law of providence, and distorts every image of nature. He walks upon *stilts*, and although perhaps no methodist talks more familiarly of *heaven* and *hell*, complains heavily of suffering the torments of the latter, and is ever, but in vain, by his own account, soliciting the blessedness of the former.

The language of love songs is profusely metaphorical; the mistress is generally a monstrous human being, armed with darts, flames and tormenting engines, and the aim of the Poet is, to disarm her of those deadly weapons. The following is a small specimen of the true metaphorical:

"With her I could for ever dwell,
  There's *heaven* within her arms;
But absent from her I'm in *hell*,
  Dire grief my soul alarms:
I rave, I burn, I pine, I die,
  Nought can my heart relieve,
But at her sight my sorrows fly,
  Her presence bids me live."

The distress of a man is certainly remarkable, who at one and the same time raves, burns, pines, and dies: it is also to be noticed that there is one circumstance in his case still more deplorable. The poor *gentleman* is in hell, a very unpleasant situation; where however I must leave him to take notice of a lover of another